

**COOPER SAYS DoD REQUEST COULD PUT AMERICAN MILITARY STRENGTH  
AT RISK**

*Supports "more flexibility in hiring practices" for civilian DoD staff without changing  
"too much, too fast"*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Representative Jim Cooper said today at a press conference on Capitol Hill that Congress owes the American people a careful evaluation of requested changes in civilian workforce rules at the Department of Defense in order to ensure that America's military strength is protected.

"As recently demonstrated by the performance of our military forces in Iraq, the Department of Defense is a highly effective organization," Cooper said at a press conference on the DoD request today. "Civilians at DoD – numbering more than 700,000 – were a critical part of this military success."

"We feel that more flexibility in hiring practices and a fair pay-for-performance system that does a better job of rewarding the best employees could be a very important step toward a more effective Department of Defense," Cooper said. "However, our concern is that in trying to go too fast in this critical area of reform, the Department risks undermining the morale and effectiveness of a patriotic and loyal civilian workforce that is a key part of the outstanding military capabilities our nation enjoys today."

As part of the Department's reauthorization, the DoD has requested broad discretion in setting new rules that govern how the Department deals with its vast civilian workforce.

Cooper, a member of the Armed Services Committee, added that he is also troubled by the lack of explicit protections for workers' rights in the request. "The proposal grants broad authority to the current – and every future – Secretary of Defense to create and manage a new personnel system that is exempt from many current employee protections. We fear that if the Department of Defense fails to use this new authority in a responsible manner, we risk returning the nation's most important government department to a 'spoils' system where political loyalty and favoritism are more important than competence and merit."

Cooper introduced a provision in committee hearings last week that would have maintained the employee protections for civilian DoD workers. While it was defeated on a party-line vote, the DoD request was later modified to include the creation of an independent appeals panel to hear employee grievances. A vote on the bill is expected this week in the House of Representatives.

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